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SUBJECT: TAJIK MFA SUDDENLY YANKS IVLP PARTICIPANTS

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a diplomatic note informing the Embassy that two participants selected for the International Visitor's Leadership Program "The Government of the States and the Local Government" will no longer be able to participate due to a "great workload." The sudden decision, two weeks prior to the program start date, surprised Post. The Embassy had previously received confirmation from all four IVLP participants, including the two who have now suddenly rescinded: M. Nasrulloev, Chairman of the city of Kurgan-Tyube and K. Mirzobekov, Chairman of the Yavan District.

2. Chargé d'Affaires and PolOff asked Deputy Foreign Minister Yatimov about the decision reversal in a meeting January 4, explaining the IVLP exchanges are in the best interests of Tajikistan and the United States and much effort has been devoted to arranging the trip. EmbOffs requested MFA assistance in encouraging the participants to reconsider their participation. Yatimov acknowledged the importance of IVLP exchanges, but made no commitments.

3. The President's Administration Office had previously confirmed the Chairmen selected could and would participate. Post is attempting to follow up with the President's Administration to seek their clarification and help in reversing the MFA's decision.

4. COMMENT: We are left trying to read into this decision since the participants themselves have not been forthcoming. It seems unlikely the Chairmen themselves decided to withdraw from the IVLP, but rather a decision from an official higher up. This is not the first time Tajik government officials have withdrawn from exchanges or trainings at the last minute, the most recent being two Deputy Minister-level participants to a November OSCE terrorist finance conference. We have also heard rumors some Tajik officials are reluctant to leave their posts for an extended period, for fear their absence provides an opportunity to place blame on them or replace them. We have made the case that exchanges and visits are in the best interests of the Tajik government, but apparently we have more convincing to do. END COMMENT.

ARMBRUSTER

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